

## SHARECROPPER LIFE IN THE BRAZOS BOTTOM

"Someone followin' you in the fields, ridin' a horse, watchin' you and tellin' you what to do. ...if you slowed up a little, oh, man, he gits up there and knock you out there. Carry a whup or a quirt or somethin' to make you go on and do what he say. ...you a man but you still a boy 'cause you had to do what the man told you. Else you couldn't stay on his place, he'd whup you. I seen the men there shot down in the field by bucking (the man). Just shot him down, 'cause he didn't want to do what the landlord say. And, then, probably he look like in the eye he wanted to buck the landlord. He kill him...shot him right in the throat. Broke his neck. We's just on the other side of the fence and we heard the gun say "Boom Boom." \* \* \*

"About three or four men near about owned fifty, sixty mile radius. Just three men... You used to couldn't stop them in the road... They beat people... (One) run over (a boy) with a car after he beat him. After he whupped the boy up and bloodied him, he's a-goin' on down the xx turn road -- you know, they call 'em turn road there, just a dirt road -- he went and got in his old Buick car and run over that boy...and knocked him down... They he got out and stomped his teeth out. See, they wear boots there, the badmen, you can tell all of them, they got them boots on. When you meet one with boots on, you say, "There's one of them bad ones." Man wearin' shoes, why, he might speak to you, but that boot man, he liable to kick you.

"...you worked on the halves. ...I'd move you on my place as a half-hander. Then I would see to your team being fed, which was my mule. I'd buy the feed for them, buy the food for you. I'd pay all the breakdown, see, and then the end of the year'd come, I would say half of the crop was yours and the other half was mine. And when it would wind up, the man who made the crop and worked for it, he didn't have any. That was the (debt), see. \* \* \*

"Now they cut out the (tenant) farms. Big man farms, they ain't no more halfhandlers. They're out of date now. ...the government even givin' them so much for digging tanks and planting grass on the land... A thousand acres and they get paid for just let their cows graze. ...no more farming there but big men. Little fellow, he got to work by the day. ...out on these construction jobs, the least they supposed to pay you is \$1.15 on up. But the farmer, he got it down some way with the government that he pays 75¢ an hour. But I heard this year the farmer'll have to pay \$1 an hour. So they all went and said they couldn't pay it...and they allowed them 75¢ an hour. \* \* \*

"...if you (sharecropping), you likely to come out a thousand dollars in debt... If he gonna sell the cotton, you don't know what he gets. Gotta take his word for it. Sell the seeds, you don't know what he get. Take his word for it. Now if he says, give you \$7 a day, why, actually, you lookin' for the end of Saturday to come. He'll pay you a portion of that if he don't pay it all to you. Course, that's your living. He know he not feeding you, you got to live out of your day wage. ... They don't pay 'em all of it, they pay 'em some. A \$7 hand, he'll get about \$6. Cut him a dollar. Cut him in the way his throat cut, and he's behind him, he get behind him and cut his throat."

Mance Lipscomb, interviewed by Rolf Cahn, KPFA,  
Berkeley, May (??), 1963.